

9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference :
Cathedrals, Hats and Selfies

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Biography

Maureen is a lecturer in the Department of Marketing at the Monash Business School of Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. She has been researching in the area of religious tourism for nearly 20 years and has a particular interest in cathedrals and their visitors.

Abstract

As tourism to religious sites increases, visitor management at such sites is an issue that is both complex and fraught with difficulties. While the visitor experience is a matter that concerns the management of the religious site, it must be considered within the wider context of the many stakeholders of the site such as worshippers, guides and clergy. This paper is based on a case study of St Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne, which in turn, is part of a larger study. An interview was conducted with the Dean of the cathedral in relation to matters including facilities for visitors and the costs involved in providing those facilities, interactions between visitors and the congregation, issues evolving from in the interactions between visitors and the congregation and security concerns for both the building and those within. The importance of providing a welcoming environment for visitors has been recognized while measures have been put in place to minimize any negative impacts that the visitors have on worshippers while delivering them with a worthwhile experience.

Introduction

St Paul's Cathedral is situated on a busy intersection in the Melbourne CBD opposite a major railway station and tourist information center, putting it very much in the sight line of visitors to Melbourne. St Paul's receives approximately 1,100 visitors per day or 400,000 visitors per year, it is open to visitors 7 days per week. The cost of opening the cathedral is about \$5,700 while donation received equate to 60cents per visitor.

Literature Review

Shackley (2001) developed a series of questions related to what she calls sacred sites, namely: "how is the site recognized?; who owns it?; who has rights of access?; what does the site mean to

different individuals and communities?; and what is its relationship to both the living and the dead?” The answers to such of questions could be seen as helping to define those involved in sites of religious significance. As the Bishop’s church it is recognized as the principal church in the diocese, it is managed by the Cathedral Chapter and access to the cathedral is open to all who wish to enter when the doors are unlocked. The answers to other two questions are less clear. The wider community within the area where the cathedral is located may view the building as an object of beauty and architectural merit and perhaps as a venue for events such as concerts, funerals and weddings. Congregants and the clergy may see it as primarily a place of worship. Under the direction of the Dean, cathedral management and volunteer guides may attach multiple meanings to the cathedral incorporating the religious and aesthetic aspects of the site. Tourism operators may view the place as a free attraction forming part of a tour program. Cathedrals also have a relationship and the dead, as well as with the living. Traditionally they are the are burial places for late bishops as is indicated by markers set into the floors or walls as memorials. The living may pay their respects to previous bishops and others buried within the cathedral grounds.

A relevant issue prevalent in the wider heritage management literature is the extent to which community needs can be reconciled with the conservation and management of heritage values (Carter and Grimwade 1997). Such issues arise in the church setting where the congregation is a present within a building that viewed exclusively as an attraction by others. Shackley (2001) has noted that sacredness does not readily cross cultural boundaries. What is viewed as sacred by one group, such as congregants, may be seen as culturally interesting by another visitor group. Given that some visitors may wish to engage in worship, Church authorities may need to determine when a request to participate in a service should be accepted as an expression of genuine interest and/or intention.

Olsen (2006) has observed that religious heritage sites are now more likely to be visited for their educational and heritage attributes than for religious purposes. Nolan and Nolan (1992) have noted that religious sites in Europe face problems related to the multiple uses to which the sites are put.

Shackley (2001) has noted two categories of visitor impact prevalent at sacred sites; physical impacts such as theft and damage, and psychological impacts on the intangible aspects of the site,

such as the spiritual dimension. She notes that site managers can no longer offer free access to all prospective visitors and that sites must be managed if they are to achieve sustainability.

In his study of tourism in Paris, Pearce (1999) devotes a whole section to churches and the problems caused by the sometimes conflicting visitor motives. He notes that signs and brochures in multiple languages encourage appropriate behavior amongst non-religious visitors. An example is the brochure used by Notre Dame Cathedral which asks non-believers not to participate in the communion service. Signs request the observance of silence, the removal of hats for men and restricted movements during services.

The issue of charging entrance fees is controversial, a common method of encouraging payment is to request donations, but typically this approach generates considerably less than the amount proposed (Price 1994). It can also be noted that cathedrals cost a lot to run and cathedral management need to be innovative in the way that they generate income from their visitors (Shackley 2006).

Methodology

An interview was conducted with the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, in line with interviews undertaken with Deans of other cathedrals in the larger study. Observations were also conducted during times of high visitation to the cathedral.

Results

While the Dean was very firm in the belief that visitors to St Pauls are welcome, he did mention some issues that had caused concern to guides and others and he discussed methods that the cathedral management employed to mitigate the effects. The cathedral has instituted a 'photography permit' which is purchased for a small fee, this has been introduced to deter visitors from taking large amounts of seemingly random photos and has been successful in this regard. A guiding application has been developed so that visitors can self-guide and not intrude on the space of worshippers. Visitors are encouraged to donate but they are also prompted to purchase additional services to add to the revenue of the cathedral.

Conclusion and Discussion

The management of sites of religious significance, such as cathedrals, continues to evolve with the use of technologies and the changing face of visitors to the sites, however some issues remain. The cost of opening such sites to the public and the often conflicting motivations of those visiting for religious and non-religious purposes continue to pose problems and invite discussion. Further research needs to be done into current issues including those posed by the threat of terrorism.

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